

✓ 305708

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

1. Name of Site:

Common Alta Vista Terrace District  
Historic

2.. Location:

Street and Number Township Section  
Alta Vista Terrace (Bet/ Grace & Byran at N. Kenmore)  
City or Town Zip Code Range 1/4 Section  
Chicago  
County  
Cook

3. Classification:

Category (check one) Integrity (check one)  
(x) District ( ) Building (x) Altered (x) Unaltered  
( ) Site ( ) Structure ( ) Moved (x) Original Site

4. Ownership:

(x) Private ( ) Public  
Status (check one)  
(x) Occupied ( ) Unoccupied  
(x) Preservation work in progress

Access to Public

( ) Yes ( ) Restricted ( ) Unrestricted (x) No

Present Use (check one or more)

( ) Agricultural ( ) Industrial ( ) Religious  
( ) Commercial ( ) Military ( ) Scientific  
( ) Educational ( ) Museum ( ) Transportation  
( ) Entertainment ( ) Park ( ) Other (specify)  
( ) Government (x) Private Residences

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name Phone Number  
Street and Number  
City or Town  
State County Zip Code

6. Description: 36 residences

(x) Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( ) Deteriorated ( ) Ruins ( ) Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway? (x) Yes ( ) No

URBAN PLANNING

7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- Archeological Site (Pre-Columbian)
- Archeological Site (Post-Columbian to 1673)
- French Influence (1673-1780)
- Illinois Frontier (1780-1818)
- Illinois Early (1818-1850)
- Illinois Middle (1850-1900)
- Illinois Late (1900-present)
- Famous People (give names & dates)

8. Specific Date: est. 1900

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- Aboriginal (historic)
- Aboriginal (pre-historic)
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communication
- Conservation
- Education
- Engineering
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape Architecture
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Political
- Religion/Philosophy
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Theater
- Transportation
- Urban Planning
- Other (specify)

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)  
Use additional sheets if necessary. National Register. Chicago Landmarks Comm. Landmark

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 6/23/75

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number: \_\_\_\_\_

City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.

- Archaeology
- Architecture
- History

1. Name of Site:

Common:

Alta Vista Terrace

Historic:

2. Location of site:

Street and Number

Between North Kenmore Avenue on the East  
and North Seminary on the West

Township

Section

City or town

Zip Code

Range

Section

Chicago

County

Cook

3. Classification

Category: (check one)

Integrity: (check one)

District

Building

Altered

Unaltered

Site

Structure

Position: (check one)

Moved

Original site

4. Ownership

Status:

Public

Occupied

Preservation

Private

Unoccupied

work in progress

Access to the public:

Yes

Restricted

Unrestricted

No

Present Use: (check one or more)

Agricultural

Industrial

Religious

Commercial

Military

Scientific

Educational

Museum

Transportation

Entertainment

Park

Other (specify)

Government

Private residence

Street and  
40 residences

5. Owner of property:

Owner's name

Phone number

Public and multiple private

Street and number

3800 to 3846 and 3801 to 3847 Alta Vista Terrace

City or town

Chicago

State

County

Section

Illinois

Cook

6. Description:  
Conditions:

Excellent     Good     Fair     Deteriorated     Ruins     Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation under way?     Yes     No  
If yes, give a brief description on the back of this page.

7. Historical themes: (check one or more of the following)

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological site      | (pre-Columbian)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological site      | (post-Columbian to 1673) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French influence         | (1673-1780)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois frontier        | (1780-1818)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois early           | (1818-1850)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois middle          | (1850-1900)              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illinois late | (1900-present)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Famous people            | (give names and dates)   |

8. Specific date of site: 1901-1904

Areas of significance: (check one or more)

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (Pre-historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (historic)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture               | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation              | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
|  |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)           |

Brief statement of significance: (Include all names and dates)  
Use back of page and additional sheets if necessary.

8. Form prepared by

Name and Title: Mrs. Susan S. Benjamin    Date: 12-11-70  
Organization: Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks  
Street and Number: 320 North Clark Street, Room 800  
City or Town: Chicago    County: Cook    Zip Code: 60610  
Phone Number:

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for references for a particular site.

When filling out the survey form, please list according to the following examples any published references to the site for which the form is being completed.

If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly reduce the surveyor's task.

Bibliography Form.

Robertson, Robert B., Of Whales and Men, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954.

### Description:

Alta Vista Terrace is a block-long street lined by forty small, single family rowhouses, twenty on each side of the street. Each row house is situated on a lot approximately 24' wide and 40' deep, with a brick party wall 18" thick between them.

On each side of the street are eighteen two-story houses, with two three-story houses occupying the middle of each row. Except for one facade, at 3826, that has been completely altered with false half-timbering, there are twenty different types of exteriors, and the order in which they occur on one side of the street is repeated on the other side starting from the opposite end.

Stylistically, the exteriors of the houses were carefully designed to emphasize individuality rather than sameness. Details of many of the rowhouses reflect the Classical Renaissance in American architecture that grew out of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Columns, pediments, and pilasters characterize several of the facades. Other details reflect adaptations of various architectural styles--late Gothic and 18th Century Adam, to name a few. In the twenty different Roman-brick facades are to be found such divergent architectural motifs as Doric and Ionic wood pilasters, flamboyant Gothic arches, Palladian windows, stained-and leaded-glass fanlights, bay and bow windows, and a wealth of moldings, brackets, dentils, and festoons. Many eclectic motifs, popular at the turn of the century, decorate the facades.

Some renovation and "modernization" has been done, not all of it in keeping with the original character of the street's design. A number of windows are glass block. Metal awnings are to be found. A few gables and several decorative finials have been removed. Still, for the most part, the exteriors have been changed in the seventy years the houses have stood.

The floor plans of the thirty-six two-story rowhouses were originally identical, as were those of the four three-story houses. The first floor of each house had an entrance stairwell, and kitchen on one side and a living room and dining room on the other. The second floor had four bedrooms and a bathroom. The top floor of the three-story houses was designed to have four additional bedrooms, mention has been made of this top floor in some cases having been used as a ballroom. Eachhouse had a full basement.

Most of the interiors have been extensively altered, and several have been restored or renovated within the last decade.

### Significance:

Hidden away in a nondescript neighborhood, Alta Vista Terrace is a street out of the past, a block-long microcosm of turn-of-the-century charm and dignity and architectural eclecticism. Begun in 1900 as one of the last real estate developments of Samuel Eberly Gross, Chicago's merchant prince of additions and subdivisions during the last two decades of the 19th century, its fascinating history endows it with a link to the past fully as important and interesting as its architectural link.

Joseph and Caroline Kirkland wrote in The Story of Chicago, published in 1894, "Of those who have contributed so much to the growth of Chicago by offering cheap suburban building sites to all who chose to buy, Samuel Elberly Gross stands easily at the head." Gross was a highly successful and unusually energetic real estate entrepreneur whose additions, subdivisions and suburbs contributed to the rapid growth of Chicago and the area to the west in the 1800's and 1890's.

### Significance, cont.

After the Panic of 1873, when trade revived and the city began its resurgence of growth, Gross, a lawyer by profession, decided to make real estate his business. By the early 1880's he was feverishly engaged in platting subdivisions and operating under a very attractive system--that of building homes for people of modest means and selling the homes for small down payments and monthly installments.

Gross achieved spectacular success, which he attributed to public will and "superior business methods". At the heights of the land boom in 1890, his firm is said to have sold up to 500 lots a week and transported as many as 3000 people in twenty-seven railroad cars in one day to inspect his West side properties. In 1891, Gross served as treasurer of the Chicago Real Estate Board. By 1894, he had sold 40,000 lots, built and sold 8000 houses and store buildings, and established eighteen subdivisions and suburbs. His fortune was estimated at 3 to 5 million dollars.

During all this frenzy of buying, selling, and building, Gross, who also served as a director of the Chemical National Bank and the Calumet Electric Railroad, did not neglect his cultural, social, or civic life. He made three trips to Europe, including a visit to the Paris Exposition in 1889, and also traveled to the West Coast, Mexico, and the Orient. He was a patron of the Art Institute of Chicago and various philanthropic societies and a member of several prestigious clubs.

It was in 1900, after returning from Europe, that Gross bought the block that became Alta Vista Terrace. It appears that as a result of looking at row-houses in London, he decided to make Alta Vista as nearly like a block of English rowhouses as possible. The property was bounded by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad on the west and an alley on the east; to avoid having his houses face either of these, Gross ran a narrow street down the middle of the plat and built a row of houses on each side of it.

Called by the Historic American Buildings Survey, the "Street of 40 Houses," Alta Vista is a narrow, tree-shaded way lined on both sides with rowhouses having an Old World feeling.

The houses on Alta Vista Terrace were substantially built and have been occupied by substantial families--not necessarily families of wealth or prominence, but families who regarded a home as a more or less permanent investment to be enjoyed and cared for. A number of the original owners lived on Alta Vista for the rest of their lives.

The present homeowners speak proudly of Alta Vista Terrace. In 1969, they received an award from the Chicago Beautiful Committee. The award praised the street for the way man-made hardness and naturalness of plant material complement each other. "The overall effect suggests that building and plant grew together."

The houses in general are well cared for; the shrubbery and plantings in the front yards are well-tended, and the character of the street has been retained.

Significance, cont.

Alta Vista provides a refreshing breathing space at the edge of an area increasingly domineered by crowding high-rises, truly an oasis in a neighborhood showing in spots the effects of neglect, age, and the inevitable litter and confusion caused by its proximity to Wrigley Field. To walk down such a street or even just to catch a glimpse of it from the cross-street at either end-- is to be transported briefly to a segment of Chicago's past that is worth remembering.

Alta Vista Terrace is a beautiful example of a situation where each house, individually, might not be outstanding but where the street, taken as a whole, is unique in Chicago.

Bibliographical References:

Album of Genealogy and Biography, Cook County, Illinois. Chicago: Calument Book and Engraving Company, 1896. pp. 382-385.

Dedmon, Emmett. Fabulous Chicago. New York: Random House, 1953. pp. 216-218.

Gross, Samuel E. The Merchant of Cornville. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Privately printed by University Press, 1896.

